

The history of this characteristic autobiography is briefly set forth in an accompanying statement, or introduction. To yourself and others, who have desired a more detailed statement, I submit the following :

In the fall of 1858, during the discussion between Senator Douglas and Mr. Lincoln, I had occasion to visit the Middle and Eastern States; and as the whole country was then agitated by the slavery question, and that discussion cut a prominent figure in the agitation, I was frequently applied to for information in reference to Mr. Lincoln. I felt my state pride flattered by these inquiries, and still more to find the New York *Tribune*, and other papers, publishing copious extracts from these discussions, taken from the Chicago press.

I did what little I could to satisfy so laudable a curiosity, not thinking, at first, that anything further would come of this discussion, in reference to Mr. Lincoln, than his election to the Senate. At length from the frequency of these inquiries, and public notices of the Illinois contest, an impression began to form, that by judicious efforts, he could be made the republican candidate for presidency in 1860.

Very soon after my return home, and after the senatorial contest had closed, one evening, as I passed on the south side of the

public square of this city, I espied the tall form of Mr. Lincoln emerging from the court house door—Judge Davis' court then being in session. I stopped until he came across the street, when after the usual salutations, I asked him to go with me into my brother (K. H. Fell's) law office, then kept over what is now the Home Bank. There we sat down, and in the calm twilight of the evening, had substantially the following conversation :

FELL.—Lincoln, I have been East, as far as Boston, and up into New Hampshire, traveling in all the New England States, save Maine; in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana; and everywhere I hear you talked about. Very frequently I have been asked “who is this man Lincoln, of your State, now canvassing in opposition to Senator Douglas?” Being, as you know, an ardent Republican, and your friend, I usually told them, we had in Illinois, *two* giants instead of one; that Douglas was the *little* one, as they all knew, but that you were the *big* one, which they didn't all know.

But, seriously, Lincoln, Judge Douglas being so widely known, you are getting a national reputation *through him*, as the result of the late discussion; your speeches in whole or in part, on both sides, have been pretty extensively published in the East; you are there regarded, by discriminating minds, as quite a match for him in debate, and the truth is, I have a decided impression, that if your popular history and efforts on the slavery question can be sufficiently brought before the people, you can be made a formidable, if not a successful, candidate for the Presidency.

LINCOLN.—Oh, Fell, what's the use talking of me for the Presidency, whilst we have such men as Seward, Chase, and others, who are so much better known to the people, and whose names are so intimately associated with the principles of the Republican party. Everybody knows them. Nobody, scarcely, outside of Illinois, knows me. Beside, is it not, as a matter of justice, due to such men, who have carried this movement forward to its present status, in spite of fearful opposition, personal abuse, and hard names? I really think so.

FELL.—There is much truth in what you say. The men you allude to, occupying more prominent positions have undoubtedly

rendered a larger service in the Republican cause than you have, but the truth is, they have rendered *too much* service to be available candidates. Placing it on the grounds of personal services, or merit if you please, I concede at once the superiority of their claims. Personal services and merit, however, when incompatible with the public good, must be laid aside. Seward and Chase have both made long records on the slavery question, and have said some very radical things, which, however, just and true in themselves, and however much these men may challenge our admiration, for their courage and devotion to unpopular truths, would seriously damage them in the contest, if nominated. We must bear in mind, Lincoln, that we are yet in a minority; we are struggling against fearful odds for supremacy; we were defeated on this same issue in 1856, and will be again in 1860, unless we get a great many new votes from what may be called the old conservative parties. These will be repelled by the radical utterances and votes of such men as Seward and Chase.

What the Republican party wants, to insure success in 1860, is a man of popular origin, of acknowledged ability, committed against slavery aggressions, who has no record to defend, and no radicalism of an offensive character, to repel votes from parties hitherto adverse. Your discussion with Douglas has demonstrated your ability, and your devotion to freedom; you have no embarrassing record; you have sprung from the humble walks of life, sharing in its toils and trials; and if we can only get these facts sufficiently before the people, depend upon it, there is some chance for you. And now, Mr. Lincoln, I come to the *business* part of this interview. My native State, Pennsylvania, will have a large number of votes to cast for somebody on the question we have been discussing. Pennsylvania don't like, overmuch, New York and her politicians; she has a candidate, Cameron, of her own, but he will not be acceptable to a larger number of her own people, much less abroad, and will be dropped. Through an eminent jurist and essayist of my native county in Pennsylvania, favorably known throughout the State, I want to get up a well-considered, well-written newspaper article, telling the people who you are, and what you have done, that it may be circulated not only in that State, but elsewhere, and thus help in manufacturing sentiment in your favor.

I know your public life and can furnish items that your modesty would forbid, but I don't know much about your private history; when you were born, and where, the names and origin of your parents, what you did in early life, what your opportunities for education, etc., and I want you to give me these. Wont you do it?

LINCOLN.—Fell, I admit the force of much that you say, and admit that I am ambitious, and would like to be President; I am not insensible to the compliment you pay me, and the interest you manifest in the matter, *but there is no such good luck in store for me, as the Presidency of these United States;* besides, there is nothing in my early history that would interest you or anybody else; and as Judge Davis says, "*It wont pay.*" Good-night.

And thus ended, for the time being, my pet scheme of helping to make Lincoln President. I notified him, however, as his giant form, wrapped in a dilapidated shawl, disappeared in the darkness, that this was not the last of it; that the *facts* must come.

The next year, 1859, I was engaged much of the time, as the corresponding secretary of the Republican State Central Committee, in traveling over the State, and in carrying out plans for a more thorough organization of the Republican party, preparatory to the great contest of 1860. I visited personally a large majority of the counties in the State, and nearly everywhere had the satisfaction of learning, that, though many doubted the possibility of nominating Lincoln, most generally it was approved of. This fact became in time very apparent to Lincoln himself, whom I not infrequently met in my travels, and in the month of December of that year, feeling that perhaps it *would "pay,"* I induced him to place in my hands this eminently characteristic paper. I made some additions to the facts, therein contained, bearing upon his political history, and immediately forwarded them to the Hon. Joseph J. Lewis, of Westchester, Pennsylvania, since Commissioner of Internal Revenue.

These constituted the basis on which that gentleman wrote a biographical sketch and notice of his public services, altogether the most complete and reliable, that ever appeared prior to his nomination. It had a wide circulation, not only in Pennsylvania, but in Illinois and throughout the country. As an evidence of its

superior merit, this same gentleman, who was one of the leading delegates at Chicago from Pennsylvania, remarked to me, the morning after the nomination, that the Chicago press had complimented him very handsomely, by reproducing his article almost entire, in response to the inquiry, then become general, "Who is Abraham Lincoln?"

Such, my dear sir, is the history of a paper that has already become historic, and which to me, at least, has a value I little dreamed of at the time. As an evidence of that fact, instead of sending to Judge Lewis a copy, I sent him the original paper, and it was not till within the last year, that in order to induce corrections in Lamon's Life of Lincoln, then in process of publication, I caused it to be returned to me. It only remains to be said, that having shown it to a number of our leading men, at Washington, Springfield, and elsewhere, so many expressed a desire to have a copy, that I placed it in the hands of J. R. Osgood & Co., of Boston, for publication.

The result is before you. There let it abide, whilst the American heart throbs for LINCOLN AND LIBERTY.

Yours truly,

JESSE W. FELL.

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